

Testimony Before the House Conservation, Forestry, and Outdoor
Recreation Committee -- December 8, 2005

Good morning! My name is Dennis Werblow. I am here today as a forester for Decorative Panels International in Alpena and as a private forest landowner in Presque Isle County; and offering my support for the bills in the Michigan Forest Package. Decorative Panels (DPI) is a manufacturer of hardboard products and finished interior wall panels. The Alpena plant employs approximately 220 workers and purchases its basic raw material, pulpwood and wood chips, from loggers and landowners throughout Northeast Michigan. Currently, about 90% of our wood is harvested from private lands.

Wood procurement for DPI was difficult during the last few years, resulting in increasing wood costs and forcing several plant production adjustments. Although the wood supply shortage has eased, it was a wake up call about how critical this raw material supply is to our business. Continued emphasis on managed (and available) private forestland and managed State forestland is crucial to balancing Michigan's timber demand and supply.

DPI's Forestry Assistance Program is in its 49th year of helping private landowners in NE MI manage their properties for forestry and wildlife benefits. Through this program, we have seen the positive results of forest management plans being put to work. Successful and sustainable aspen management is evident in the fact that some of the same areas that we harvested in the 1960's and 1970's are being logged again.

We have seen the trend of forest fragmentation disrupt sustainable forest management. As larger properties are split, existing forest management plans are typically abandoned and forgotten; thereby having to repeat the process of educating and informing new forest landowners. The amount of managed (and available) timber supply invariably is reduced. The tax incentives of HB's 5457, 5458 and 5462 would help keep forest management plans and productive private forests working.

HB 5453 addresses the treatment-limiting factors used by the MDNR within the inventory to determine state forestlands that can receive treatment. The system is arbitrarily restrictive and results in far too many acres removed from treatment consideration each year. Of the 3.2 million acres of state forestland, only about 690,000 do not have treatment limitations. The remaining acres are a hidden opportunity to improve the productive ability of our state forestlands.

The Michigan Forest Package is a much-appreciated step forward to help keep Michigan's forests working for landowners, DPI, the forest products industry, and Michigan's citizens. Thank you very much!